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A new bill, inspired by a Delco woman's death, aims to crack down on Pa.'s repeat DUI drivers

by [Vinny Vella](#), Updated: August 28, 2019



ANTHONY PEZZOTTI / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Lawmakers in Delaware County, inspired by the death of a woman killed by a six-time drunk driver, are hoping a new piece of legislation will close what they call a persistent “loophole” in Pennsylvania law.

State Sen. Thomas H. Killion (R., Delaware) unveiled “Deana’s Law” on Wednesday, an amendment to the state vehicle code named after Deana Eckman that increases the penalties for repeat DUI offenders.

“We must use everything at our disposal to go after the worst of the worst,” Killion said, thanking Eckman’s parents, Roseann and Richard DeRosa, for their continued advocacy.

“They’re dealing with unimaginable heartbreak,” Killion said, “but they’ve remained steadfast in their pursuit of change in Deana’s name.”

Eckman, 45, was killed in February in a head-on collision caused by David Strowhouer, a Willistown resident who had five previous DUI convictions. Investigators said that at the time of the crash, Strowhouer had a blood-alcohol level of 0.199 — more than double the legal definition of drunken driving — and was speeding down Market Street in Upper Chichester Township at nearly 80 mph.

Strowhouer, 30, pleaded guilty Aug. 15 to third-degree murder, homicide by vehicle while driving under the influence, and related offenses in Eckman’s death. The maximum sentence on those charges is 89 years in prison.

Killion’s measure has received early support, with 13 co-sponsors from both sides of the aisle. Local supporters include State Sens. Gene Yaw (R., Bucks), Timothy P. Kearney (D., Delaware), Steven J. Santarsiero (D., Bucks), and Bob Mensch (R., Bucks-Montgomery).

The proposed legislation would add new layers to DUI prosecution in the state, including a mandatory requirement for drivers with three or more DUI convictions to wear electronic alcohol ankle monitors as a condition of probation.



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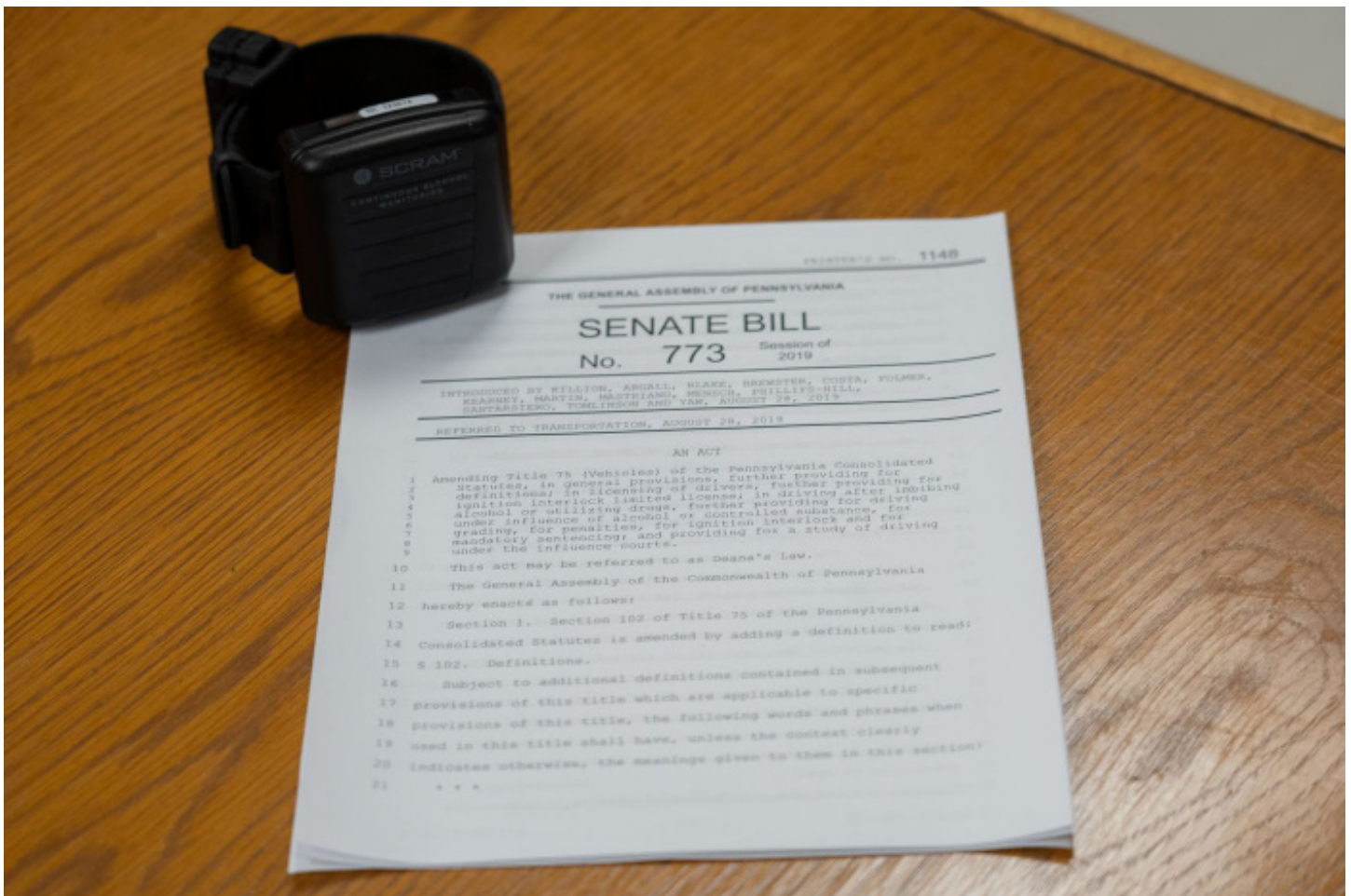
District Attorney Katayoun M. Copeland comforts Deanna Eckman’s mother, Roseann Derosa, as the details of “Deana’s Law” are announced.

Killion's bill also would impound the vehicles of drivers arrested for DUI who have three or more convictions, and would require multiple DUI sentences to be served consecutively, not concurrently.

That aspect was directly inspired by Strowhouer. For his fifth DUI conviction in 2017, he was sentenced to one to five years in prison, a term ordered to be served concurrently with the sentences for his third and fourth DUIs, to the latter of which he had pleaded guilty in Chester County just days earlier.

As a result, Strowhouer was paroled after a little less than a year behind bars, credited for time served.

“If he was where he should’ve been that night — in jail — this wouldn’t have happened,” Roseann DeRosa said. “The system failed, and we’re trying to fix the system.”



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Killion displayed a sample of the electronic alcohol monitors that would be mandatory for repeat DUI offenders to wear.

Some counties in the state, including York, already use the alcohol monitoring devices Killion is calling for on a voluntarily basis and have seen sharp declines in DUI recidivism.

“We saw an issue with the amount of people racking up repeated offenses while being on bail, and we saw a lack of communication in the system,” said First Assistant District Attorney Tim Barker, who reviews DUI cases in York County.

“There was a need and a desire to get to the root of the problems of how this occurred,” Barker added.

Since 2012, York County has included a special set of pretrial bail conditions that require constant alcohol monitoring under a program called “Target 25,” a reference to the statistic that 25% of DUI suspects have driven drunk before.

Under the program, defendants with a previous DUI conviction or another pending DUI case from within the last decade must wear an alcohol monitor and meet regularly with a bail officer, according to Barker.

In 2018, 71% of the Target 25 participants were in full compliance with the program and didn’t face any new DUI arrests, Barker said.



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